

THE MOLECULAR EPIDEMIOLOGY OF DENGUE VIRUS SEROTYPE 4 IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Dengue represents a major public health problem in Thailand, with all four viral serotypes co-circulating. Dengue virus serotype 4 (DENV-4) is the least frequently sampled serotype, although one that is often associated with hemorrhagic fever during secondary infection. To determine the evolutionary forces shaping the genetic diversity of DENV-4, and particularly whether its changing prevalence could be attributed to instances of adaptive evolution in the viral genome, we undertook a large-scale molecular epidemiological analysis of DENV-4 in Bangkok using both E gene sequences and complete viral genomes. This analysis revealed extensive genetic diversity within a single locality at a single time, including the discovery of a new and divergent genotype of DENV-4, as well as a pattern of continual lineage turnover. However, despite this abundant genetic variation, there was no evidence for adaptive evolution in any gene, codon, or lineage of DENV-4. Consequently, the rapid turnover of DENV-4 lineages through time is most likely the consequence of a high rate of deleterious mutation in the viral genome coupled to seasonal fluctuations in the size of the vector population.

Abstract of the Joint International Tropical Medicine Meeting (JITMM). Bangkok, Thailand. 29 November-1 December 2004:165.

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Dengue represents a major public health problem in Thailand, with all four viral serotypes co-circulating. Dengue virus serotype 4 (DENV-4) is the least frequently sampled serotype, although one that is often associated with hemorrhagic fever during secondary infection. To determine the evolutionary forces shaping the genetic diversity of DENV-4, and particularly whether its changing prevalence could be attributed to instances of adaptive evolution in the viral genome, we undertook a large-scale molecular epidemiological analysis of DENV-4 in Bangkok, Thailand, using both E gene and complete coding region sequences. This analysis revealed extensive genetic diversity within a single locality at a single time, including the discovery of a new and divergent genotype of DENV-4, as well as a pattern of continual lineage turnover. We also recorded the highest average rate of evolutionary change for this serotype, at 1.072×10^{-3} nucleotide substitutions per site, per year. However, despite this abundant genetic variation, there was no evidence for adaptive evolution in any gene, codon, or lineage of DENV-4, with the highest rate of nonsynonymous substitution observed in NS2A. Consequently, the rapid turnover of DENV-4 lineages through time is most likely the consequence of a high rate of deleterious mutation in the viral genome coupled to seasonal fluctuations in the size of the vector population.

Virology. 2004; 329(1): 168-79.
